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TARMIfp Progress Quarterly Report **FY 2012 (July - September 2012)**

School Capacity and Innovation Program (SCIP)

Project Title: TARMIfp

Teacher Assessment Resources for Monitoring and Improving
Instruction in the Foundation Phase



Cooperative Agreement Number: AID-674-A-12-00023

Agreement Start and End Dates: July, 01, 2012 to June, 30, 2015

Project Locations: South Africa (Limpopo, Free-State, Mpumalanga, North-West)

Donor 1: USAID

Donor 2: ELMA Foundations

Donor 3: JP Morgan

1. Introduction

The TARMII-fp project has two main goals: (a) to improve teaching and assessment practices through the use of a fully developed TARMII-fp with literacy Home Language assessment items for grades 1,2, 3; (b) to assess the impact of TARMII-fp on teacher classroom assessment practices and on learner achievement in literacy. This report outlines the activities undertaken to achieve objectives set for this reporting period.

2. Objectives and activities undertaken during the reporting period

The objective during the current reporting period was to achieve the following:

- (a) Obtain district and provincial education buy-in and approval to gain access to identified districts in the four participating provinces, namely, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North-West; select project schools and set up provincial steering committees
- (b) Develop literacy assessment items
- (c) Develop TARMII_fp software

2.1 District and provincial education buy-in and approval

The HSRC team, which includes, Dr Vijay Reddy, Prof Thenjiwe Meyiwa, Dr Nosisi Piyose, Dr Nolutho Diko, Mr Matthews Makgamatha, Ms Matselane Tshukudu, Dr George Frempong, Mr Maglin Moodley, Dr Charlotte Motha and Elmi de Koning, worked extensively on the project during the planning phase. Planning activities included among others: putting together budgets, Work Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, having frequent project meetings to discuss project implementation in the four provinces, contacting provinces to secure meeting appointments, travel to Mpumalanga (Nkangala district), North West (Bojanala district), Limpopo (Vhembe district) to present the project to senior district officials, discuss selection of schools and set up provincial steering committees.

2.1.1 Provincial meetings

Limpopo Province

The Dzindi Circuit Manager, whom the TARMII-fp team have been working with on another project, secured an appointment between the HSRC and the Vhembe district office. Our first meeting with the Senior District Manager and the Acting Senior District Manager to discuss the project including the selection of schools and setting up of a steering committee was held on the 16th of August. The criteria for selecting schools were emailed to the district office. At the same time we sought permission from the provincial office to carry out the project and received letter of permission on 25 September. The next meeting with the Vhembe senior district officials is planned for 30 October 2012.

North West

The HSRC team had its first meeting with the Executive District Manager of Bojanala district and other officials in the district on 17 September 2012. The team presented the proposed research project to Bojanala District Officials. During this meeting, the District team committed to supporting and partnering with the HSRC during the life of the project. They also undertook to put together proposed names of the steering committee as well as to identify project schools. Subsequent to this meeting, the district identified a contact person for the project, Mrs Mokhutle, who is the District Director for Professional Support. Two districts were identified for project implementation, namely, Letlhabile and Madibeng. The two have subsequently forwarded names of the 40 schools that would be participating in the project.

Mpumalanga

The first meeting with the Nkangala District Director and other district officials took place on the 10th of September where the proposed TARMII-fp was presented. The discussions at this meeting included, the selection of project schools and the composition of the steering committee. The District office undertook to report back to the HSRC on the selected circuits and schools and the constitution of the steering committee. The next meeting was planned for the 2nd of October, where the District would report of the two issues. The issue of rewarding control school was raised by district and discussed. It was resolved that the HSRC would explore possibilities of rewarding these schools at the end of the project.

Kwa-Zulu Natal

Dr Nosisi Piyose of the HSRC Durban office made first contact with the Director of Foundation phase in KwaZulu-Natal on the 25th of July to introduce the project and to request permission to carry out the study. She was referred to a contact person in the provincial office and made repeated follow-up but could not get response from the person. On the 20th of August, the HSRC Durban team received an email from the provincial office, which read, “The KZN Department of Education appreciates your interest in conducting research in the Provincial institutions. In order for to process your application, kindly complete and return the attached application form”. The forms were completed and returned to the provincial office on the 25th of September. Follow-up contacts were made with the provincial office but Dr Piyose was informed that it would take a month before the provincial office responds to our application. Since further delays would affect project implementation in that province, the HSRC team decided to abandon Kwa-Zulu Natal and explore Gauteng, Tshwane West and Tshwane South Districts. Given that the initial TARMII was piloted in the Tshwane-South District, this district would be most likely to welcome TARMII-fp.

2.2 Development of assessment items/activities

The development of literacy assessment activities included, mapping the existing English Home Language assessment activities of grades 1, 2 &3 to the CAPS, and developing new additional English HL assessment items/activities. This process would then be followed, in a staggered fashion, by processes of using accommodations to adapt (translate / version) the English assessment activities into the other 10 official languages.

Identifying potential item writers/developers

On the 17th of July, the HSRC research team had a meeting with a group of potential writers or developers of literacy assessment activities for various official languages. The invited people included independent material developers, a university lecture (a teachers educator), Foundation Phase teachers from schools around Pretoria.

Individuals at the meeting were requested to e-mail their CVs to the HSRC for purposes of selecting appropriate writers. From studying the CVs and further consultations with individuals concerned, it became clear that some of these potential writers;

- did not have Foundation Phase experience or had never worked at this level of the school system;
- were already engaged in other (private) work and would not have time to work on TARMII_fp;
- have never worked with the CAPS curriculum

These problems posed considerable challenges to the timely development of the assessment items. The HSRC research team then decided to explore other possibilities of developing the items. The team contacted Dr Paula Gains from the Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy. Dr Gains was asked to present a report on how her organisation could assist the HSRC with the development of the assessment items and how much this would cost. Regrettably, the HSRC decided not to pursue the Molteno participation further as their quote for the task (development of assessment activities) was far beyond what the current TARMII budget would allow.

Given the above challenges, the HSRC research team decided to use Foundation Phase (i.e. grade 1, 2 and 3) teachers to map existing assessment items to the CAPS and to develop new CAPS aligned items. Two practising foundation phase teachers and a retired Foundation Phase senior district education specialist (SES), were contracted.

Mapping of ARB test items and the Development of 1000 assessment items in English

The process of mapping existing items and developing new English assessment activities occurred simultaneously. The writers had to map and produce new assessment activities for the four Language Components (namely, Listening and Speaking, Reading, Phonics, and Writing) as specified in the CAPS document. As at the end of the reporting period, the HSRC has completed a draft of the assessment activities for the Listening and Speaking for grades 1, 2 and 3.

2.3 Development of TARMII-fp software

Designing TARMII-fp interface

The HSRC team met to conceptualise the “look and function” of the new TARMII. This was followed by a number of teleconferences with the software developer, Roche Compaan to discuss the development stages of the software. A face-to face meeting was held with Roche on the 2nd of August. At this meeting, it was agreed that the interface would include the old tested functions and modules as well as new innovative functions. The following key issues were discussed and agreed upon:

- the system would have a remote data collection function wherein data would be automatically received by the HSRC when teachers log onto the TARMII_fp system and a multi-language interface
- type of media clips to be included in the software.
- the graphic design appearance of the interface and responsibility to design it.
- the hosting responsibility

It was also decided that a separate interface of TARMII-fp be designed rather than duplicating the existing TARMII. The rationale for this was that a common landing page could then be developed that would allow navigation between the two programs.

Development of TARMII-fp pedagogic clips

In August 2012, the HSRC contracted a graphic designer to design and develop pedagogic clips that would guide teachers in teaching identified areas in the Foundation Phase. To ensure the success of this exercise, the team secured the services of a seasoned Foundation phase HOD to work with the graphic designer in ensuring that problem areas that foundation phase teachers grapple with.

Purchase of 85 computers and 3G

On the 6th of September, the TARMII-fp research team had a meeting with ACER South Africa, HSRC Supply Chain Management (SCM) and the HSRC IT Director to outline specification for the 85 computers and 3Gs to be purchased. SCM identified a supplier and an order was issued for the 85 laptops. Included with the laptops would be laptop bags, mouse and 3G dongles. The supplier undertook to have the laptops delivered to the HSRC by 26 October 2012.

3. Describe challenges and opportunities encountered

The following challenges and opportunities were encountered with the development of assessment items/activities:

Teacher understanding and interpretation of the CAPS

Various Foundation Phase teachers interpreted the CAPS differently. This was evident in the draft assessment activities that teachers submitted to the HSRC. To counter this, the HSRC team sought to interact and consult with more teachers, district officials and other education allied professionals outside the school systems to get a good understanding of what is expected of teachers to implement the CAPS successfully in the classroom. This process was helpful in giving insights into CAPS implementation and this information was shared with assessment item writers.

Developing assessment activities

The ability to develop good assessment activities is a highly specialised skill which few individual teachers in South African possess. Although the three contracted teachers have had previous experience with item development, they were not adequately skilled to carry out the task. In order to ensure that the TARMII_fp items were of good quality, the HSRC research team had to employ an internal quality assurance mechanism, wherein, each of the three teachers who maps and writes assessment items would have their work first checked by the HSRC researcher(s) and commented on. The corrected version would then be checked and moderated by the other two writers.

Limited time frame for the mapping and development of assessment activities:

The initial time-frame for mapping and developing assessment activities was congested. Writers were required to work on assessment activities for a language component for 10 days. This timeframe proved to be too tight for practising teachers who had to juggle between their teaching job and writing items after hours, during weekends or during school holidays. The retired member of the writing team could also not cope with the set time-frames. This was countered by relaxing the timeframe for delivery, by adding extra days.

4. Lessons Learnt

Given seemingly acute dearth of expertise for developing assessment items among teachers in schools, a project such as TARMII_fp is more relevant in addressing this issue by setting aside funds earmarked specifically for training teachers on how to write good assessment items.

5. Do you foresee any issues arising for the next reporting period that will constrain the achievement of the goal

While the process of writing and assuring quality of English HL assessment items would be completed during the October-December reporting period, the process of adapting (translating or versioning) these assessment activities into the other 10 official languages is likely to continue until March 2013.

6. International visit

Dr George Frempong visited the Canadian research Institute for Social Policy at the University of New Brunswick from 13th – 20th August 2012 to meet with TARMII_fp research collaborator, Dr Doug Willms. During the visit Dr Frempong organised a meeting on 14th August, 2012, through Skype, between Professor Willms and the HSRC research team to discuss TARMII_fp. The HSRC research team that were part of this meet included George Frempong, Maglin Moodley, Matthews Makgamatha, Nolutho Diko and Maseabata Molefe. Dr Frempong had an opportunity to meet with Suzan Kendall, Director of the School-in-a-Box project. Through this project, she has been able to develop reading curriculum materials for Ontario (Canada) teachers in the foundation phase (see <http://www.schoolinabox.ca/about-us.html>).